City of Alameda
Objective Design Review Standards for One- and Two-Family Dwellings

Adopted by Planning Board Resolution No. PB-21-14

on December 13, 2021

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE

The Objective Design Review Standards for One- and Two-Family Dwellings serve as minimum architectural and site design requirements for new construction of and additions and alterations to one- and two-family dwellings that are eligible for ministerial design review.

The Objective Design Review Standards supplement the development standards of the Zoning Ordinance and further the goals, policies, and actions of the Alameda General Plan, which encourages high-quality design and the quality of life that an enhanced built environment fosters.

APPLICABILITY

The Objective Design Review Standards apply to **projects consisting of one- and two-family dwellings that State law provides may only be reviewed against objective standards**, including:

- Projects that contain no more than two residential units and meet the requirements of Government Code Section 65852.21 ("SB 9 projects" in single-family residential zones).
- Affordable housing projects eligible for streamlined ministerial review pursuant to SB 35 (Section 65913.4 of the Government Code).
- Any other one- and two-unit housing projects that current or future State law provides may only be reviewed against objective standards.

The Objective Design Review Standards for One- and Two-Family Dwellings were adopted by the Planning Board on December 13, 2021 and go into effect as of the date of adoption.

Note that projects consisting of three or more dwellings shall instead be reviewed against the Objective Design Review Standards for Multi-family Dwellings, adopted by the Planning Board on February 22, 2021.

Ministerial Design Review

Where California law requires that the design of a project be reviewed only against objective standards, the Objective Design Review Standards will serve as the standards for design review. Ministerial design review will be processed by Planning Services Division staff, without a public hearing.

Discretionary Design Review

If a project that would be eligible for ministerial design review does not meet one or more of the Objective Design Review Standards, and the applicant wishes to propose an alternative design, the applicant may elect to go through the discretionary design review process described in Section 30-36, Design Review Procedure, of the Alameda Municipal Code (AMC). In such case, the project will be reviewed for conformance with the Citywide Design Review Manual, the Guide to Residential Design, and any other design guidelines that apply to the site. Discretionary design review may only be approved if the findings for design review approval of Section 30-37.5, Findings, of the AMC are made.

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER REGULATIONS

All development must comply with the standards of Alameda Municipal Code Chapter XXX, Development Regulations (the Zoning Ordinance). Accordingly, projects subject to these Objective Design Review Standards must also comply with the regulations of the Zoning Ordinance.

DOCUMENT ORGANIZATION

This document covers various topics related to site and architectural design. It is organized by project type. The first set of standards applies to all types of projects involving one- and two-family dwellings. The second set applies to additions, alterations and new buildings on lots with existing buildings. The third set contains special standards for second-story additions. The final set applies to raising a building.

STANDARDS

STANDARDS FOR ALL ONE- AND TWO-FAMILY DWELLING PROJECTS

The following standards apply to all types of applicable projects involving one- and two-family dwellings, including new construction of one- and two-family dwellings on vacant lots, construction of new dwellings on lots with existing houses, and additions and alterations to existing houses.

When projects create or result in building or site elements addressed by the standards, these elements must comply with the standards. It is not necessary to correct existing legal nonconforming conditions in order to comply with the standards. For example, if an existing legally constructed garage is located closer to the street than the remainder of the façade, it need not be moved in order to meet the garage location standard. However, if a garage is newly constructed or expanded as part of a proposed project, it must meet the garage location standard.

Parking and Garages	Project Complies		
	Yes	No	N/A
A. Carports and Uncovered Parking. New or expanded carports and uncovered parking areas must be located behind or to the side of buildings in relation to any streets fronting the subject property. They may not be located between a building and the street. If a lot contains two or more detached buildings that are located behind one another, surface parking and carports may be located between the buildings but may not be located between the building closest to the street and the street.	☐	☐	☐
B. Detached Garages. New or expanded detached garages shall be located behind residential buildings. On a corner lot, a new or expanded detached garage may be located to face the secondary street[1] and need not be located behind the dwelling in relation to the secondary street.	☐	☐	☐
C. Attached Garages.			
1. ***Street-facing Garages.*** Any new or expanded garage with a door facing a street shall meet the following standards:	*Meet both of the following:*		
a. *Width.* Garage doors shall not occupy more than 50% of the width of any building façade.	☐	☐	☐
b. *Placement.*. An attached garage may not be located closer to the street than the remainder of the building façade.	☐	☐	☐

[1] Primary and Secondary Streets. For lots with frontage along more than one street (e.g., corner lots, through lots), the primary street will be considered the street abutting the "front yard," as defined in AMC Section 30-2. The other street shall be considered the secondary street.

Building Orientation and Entries	Project Complies		
	Yes	No	N/A
A. Entry Location and Orientation. Building entrances shall be oriented to face the street, according to the following standards.			
1. At least one dwelling unit on each lot shall have a door that:	*Meet one:*		
a. Faces the street; or	☐	☐	
b. Opens onto a porch with an entrance that faces the street.	☐	☐	
2. If a lot contains two side-by-side detached dwelling units positioned along the street frontage, each unit shall include a door that faces the street.	☐	☐	☐
3. If two attached dwellings are proposed on an interior lot, at least one of the units shall be oriented with a door facing the street. The entry for the other unit may either face the street or be located on a side or rear façade.	☐	☐	☐
4. Street-facing building entries shall be connected to the public street with a pedestrian path.	☐	☐	
B. Porches. Street-facing building entries must have roofed projections or recesses with a minimum depth of at least five feet and a minimum area of 25 square feet.	☐	☐	☐

Architectural Details and Materials	Project Complies		
	Yes	No	N/A
A. Siding.	*Checking "yes" for 1a – 1c indicates that prohibited material is **not** used.*		
1. ***Prohibited Materials***. The following shall not be used as siding materials:			
a. Vinyl (plastic) siding.	☐	☐	
b. Aluminum siding.	☐	☐	
c. T1-11 wood siding.	☐	☐	
2. ***Specific Requirements for Certain Materials***.			
a. *Exposed Wood.* If exposed wood (other than wood shingles) is used, it shall be painted, stained, or treated and maintained to prevent noticeable weathering.	☐	☐	☐
b. *Thin Brick Veneers.* Thin brick veneers, where used, shall be selected to give the appearance of full brick. Wrap-around pieces shall be used at window recesses and building corners.	☐	☐	☐
c. *Fiber Cement and Other Synthetic Siding.* Synthetic siding shall have smooth textures. Simulated wood grain textures shall not be used.	☐	☐	☐
B. Windows.			
1. ***No Blank Walls.*** Each street-facing façade must contain windows, a door, or other openings.	☐	☐	☐

Architectural Details and Materials	Project Complies		
	Yes	No	N/A
2. ***Window Recess or Trim***. At least one of the following standards shall be met:	*Meet at least one:*		
a. Windows are recessed at least 3/4 inches, measured from the window sash to the exterior wall surface (not including any trim in the measurement).	☐	☐	☐
b. Trim at least two inches in depth is applied along the top and both sides of a window with a sill along the bottom. Trim depth is measured from exterior face of the trim to the window sash.	☐	☐	☐
3. ***Divided Lites/Muntins***. If divided-lite windows are utilized, they may have true/full divided lites or simulated divided lites, in accord with the following standards: a. Muntins or grids shall project at least three-eighths (3/8) of an inch from the exterior glass surface.	☐	☐	☐
b. For simulated divided lites, spacers shall be used between panes.	☐	☐	☐
c. Sandwich muntins, where muntin material is located between two panes of glass, but not on the exterior or interior of the window, are prohibited.	☐	☐	☐
d. Roll-on or tape muntins are prohibited.	☐	☐	☐
C. Trim. Window and corner trim shall be no smaller than 1" x 4"; however, if a proposed project has stucco siding, "stucco mold" window trim 2" to 3" wide may be used.	☐	☐	☐

Landscaping	Project Complies		
	Yes	No	N/A
A. Landscaping of Street-facing Yards. In accord with Section 30-5.7 of the AMC, front yards and corner side yards shall be landscaped, except for areas used for walkways, driveways, and staircases.	☐	☐	☐
B. Trees. 1. ***Prohibited Species.*** Palm trees are not permitted unless the City's solid waste program accepts palm fronds for composting.	☐	☐	☐
2. ***Maintenance of Existing Mature Trees During Construction.*** The following requirements shall be printed on the approved building permit plans: "The project shall provide diligent maintenance and care for any mature trees, defined as any native tree species with a trunk diameter of 18" measured 4.5 feet above ground level, as well as any protected tree pursuant to AMC Section 13-21, on the property during construction. a. Construction, cutting and filling around the base of trees shall be done only after consultation with a certified arborist. b. Barricades shall be erected around the trunks of trees as recommended by the certified arborist to prevent injury to the mature trees. c. No construction equipment, vehicles or materials shall be stored, parked or standing within the tree dripline."	☐	☐	☐

ADDITIONS AND NEW BUILDINGS ON LOTS WITH EXISTING BUILDINGS

These standards apply to additions to and alterations of existing buildings, as well as to construction of new buildings on lots with existing buildings. Any reference to "the existing building" means the existing main building(s) on the same lot as the proposed project. If a lot has been divided using the lot split provisions of Government Code Section 66411.7, existing buildings also include any buildings on the original (presubdivided) lot.

Additions and Additional Buildings	Project Complies		
	Yes	No	N/A
A. Maintenance of Existing Features. The construction of additions, alterations, and new structures shall not obscure, damage, destroy or remove any original architectural details or materials of an existing main building, except as necessary to construct and integrate an addition.	☐	☐	☐
B. Maintenance of Porches. An addition or alteration shall not result in the enclosure of an existing porch.	☐	☐	☐
C. Roof Form and Pitch. An addition or alteration shall maintain the roof form(s) of the existing building and match the existing roof pitch. A new building shall exhibit the same roof form(s) as the existing building but need not match the existing roof pitch as long as the pitch is not shallower than the existing roof pitch. Examples of roof forms are gable, hip, mansard, gambrel, flat, shed, bonnet, and false front.	☐	☐	☐
D. Roof Eaves. An addition, alteration, or new building must include eaves that match the eaves on the existing building, including depth.	☐	☐	☐
E. Porch Columns. An addition, alteration, or new building shall exhibit porch columns of the same shape and proportions as those of the existing buildings and typical of the architectural style[2] of the existing building.	☐	☐	☐
F. Windows. The windows on street-facing façade(s) of an addition, alteration, or new building must meet the following standards. 1. ***Orientation.*** a. If the windows of the existing building are vertically oriented (taller than they are wide), then the windows of the proposed project shall also be vertically oriented.	☐	☐	☐
b. If the existing building exhibits groupings of windows, the proposed project may replicate these groupings including the separation between each window. Such groupings can include but are not limited to: i. Groups or pairs of side-by-side vertically oriented windows that together form a horizontal bank of windows. ii. A square or horizontally oriented window flanked by vertically oriented windows (side lites).	☐	☐	☐
2. ***Proportions.*** Windows on the addition, alteration, or new building shall match the proportions (ratio of height to width) of the windows that predominate (occur most frequently) on the existing building and window type (double-hung, casement, etc.), and muntin pattern, if any.	☐	☐	☐

[2] The identification of architectural style shall be according to the characteristics listed in the Guide to Residential Design, the booklet titled "Architectural and Historical Resources of the City of Alameda," or Section 4.3 of the Citywide Design Review Manual. See Appendix A.

Additions and Additional Buildings	Project Complies		
	Yes	No	N/A
3. ***Major Divisions.***			
a. If the windows of the existing building exhibit rails, other divisions between sashes, or mullions, then any such divisions on the windows of the proposed addition or alteration shall be in the same orientation (i.e., horizontal or vertical). For example, if the reference building(s) have predominantly single- or double-hung windows, which have a horizontal rail where the two sashes meet, then the windows of the proposed project shall not be horizontal slider windows, which have vertical divisions.	☐	☐	☐
b. The divisions shall be positioned to correspond with their positioning on the existing building. Meeting rails for single- or double-hung windows shall be positioned in the center or the upper half of the window opening.	☐	☐	☐
4. ***Alignment.***			
a. The windows on an addition shall align with existing windows on other floors of the building.	☐	☐	☐
b. The tops of new windows in an addition shall align with the tops of existing windows on the same story of the building.	☐	☐	☐
G. Trim. The proposed addition, alteration or new building shall include window and corner trim of the same depth and width (to within ½ inch) as the trim on the existing building, and no smaller than 1" x 4". However, if the existing building and proposed project have stucco siding, "stucco mold" window trim 2" to 3" wide may be used.	☐	☐	☐
H. Materials. The primary exterior material(s) used on an addition, alteration, or new building must be selected from primary exterior materials of the existing building. In order to be considered primary, a material must cover at least one-half of the area of the street-facing façade(s) of a building. Qualifying exterior materials are:	*Incorporate one of the following materials:*		
1. Horizontal wood siding. Note: Where the existing building has horizontal wood siding, the proposed project may use cement fiber or similar synthetic horizontal siding, but the siding must be smooth surfaced (without imitation raised wood grain) and it may not be vinyl or aluminum, and otherwise visually match the existing siding.	☐	☐	☐
2. Board and batten siding. Note: Plywood may be used as a substitute for boards only if wood battens with a dimension at least 1" x 2" are used at minimum 8" intervals on center, and any Z-bar is covered by trim.	☐	☐	☐
3. Wood shingles. Note: Where the existing building has wood shingles, the proposed project may use cement fiber or similar synthetic shingles, but they must be smooth surfaced (without imitation raised wood grain) and they may not be vinyl or aluminum, and must visually match existing shingles.	☐	☐	☐
4. Stucco.	☐	☐	☐
5. Pressed brick.	☐	☐	☐
6. Stone, including architectural terra cotta and other stone-like materials.	☐	☐	☐

Additions and Additional Buildings	Project Complies		
	Yes	No	N/A
7. "Half timber," consisting of individual pieces of dimensioned lumber surrounded by stucco.	☐	☐	☐

UPPER-STORY ADDITIONS

In addition to meeting the standards of the preceding section for all additions, projects that involve adding a new upper story to an existing building, or expanding or altering an existing upper story, must meet the following standards.

Upper-story Additions		Project Complies		
		Yes	No	N/A
A.	**Distinction.** The upper floor(s) of the building must be delineated from the first floor with either:	*Include one or more treatment:*		
	1. Trim or other horizontal design feature such as a belt course or bellyband, applied to the transition between the first floor and upper floor(s); or	☐	☐	☐
	2. A change in materials between the first floor and upper floor(s).	☐	☐	☐
B.	**Windows/Openings.** Any part of the addition that faces a street shall include windows or other openings. No blank wall shall face a street.	☐	☐	☐
C.	**Window Alignment.** On street-facing facades, new or altered upper-floor windows must align with the first-floor windows.	☐	☐	☐
D.	**Plate Height.** A new upper story shall have a maximum plate height of 7'6". An addition to expand an existing two- or three-story building shall match the existing plate height of the building.	☐	☐	☐
E.	**Privacy Standards.** Windows that are not required by the Building Code and are located on upper stories and closer than 10 feet from and facing an existing dwelling on an adjacent property shall be designed to maximize privacy for adjacent properties by using at least one of the following design treatments:	*Use one or more treatments:*		
	1. Sill height at least 60 inches above the finished floor.	☐	☐	☐
	2. Window offset such that the centerline of the glazing is more than two (2) lateral feet from the centerline of any glazing on an existing dwelling on an adjacent lot.	☐	☐	☐
	3. Any window sash located partially or entirely below 60 inches from the finished floor consists of frosted or obscured glass that is patterned or textured such that objects, shapes, and patterns beyond the glass are not easily distinguishable.	☐	☐	☐
F.	**Second-Story Additions to Bungalows**. If a new second story will be added to an existing one-story bungalow house, the second-story addition shall:	*Meet both:*		
	1. Have a side-facing gable roof or hipped roof; and	☐	☐	☐
	2. Be recessed a minimum of 15 feet from the face of the front façade.	☐	☐	☐
G.	**Rear Additions.** A two-story addition to the rear of an existing one-story house shall have a non-elevated foundation system in order to reduce the overall height of the addition.	☐	☐	☐

RAISING A BUILDING

In addition to meeting the standards for all additions, projects that involve raising an existing building to create new ground-floor space below must meet the following standards.

Standards for Raising a Building		Project Complies		
		Yes	No	N/A
A.	**Height/Proportions.** The height of the new first story (the raised part of the structure) shall be no more than 0.6 of the height of the upper story (the original part of the structure), as measured from the floor joist to the ceiling joist of the upper floor, unless the project is designed to incorporate the measures in subsection (B) below.	☐	☐	☐
B.	**Mitigating Design Treatments.** The height of the new first story may be between 0.6 and 0.7 of the height of the upper story if the project incorporates one or more of the following design treatments:	*Use one or more treatments:*		
	1. A horizontal water table ("belly band") positioned on the building exterior to meet the 0.6 proportional standard;	☐	☐	☐
	2. Street-facing stairs maximize rise over run as allowed under CBC to reduce the appearance of an elongated staircase or a ladder up to the main floor; or	☐	☐	☐
	3. The grade at the bottom of the staircase or the front of the entire building is elevated to provide terraced landings necessary to step up to the existing staircase without extending the staircase.	☐	☐	☐
C.	**Window Alignment.** New window openings on street-facing facades in the raised portion of the structure must align with original window openings on the original part of the house.	☐	☐	☐

APPENDIX A: ARCHITECTURAL STYLE GUIDES

The following sources describe architectural styles that are common in Alameda. Each source contains a series of illustrations of architectural styles, labeled with features that are typical of the style. Any of these three sources may be used to identify the architectural style of a building.

THE GUIDE TO RESIDENTIAL DESIGN (2005), APPENDIX PART IV, GUIDE TO ALAMEDA'S ARCHITECTURE

Appendix Part IV from the Guide to Residential Design (2005) presents a series of illustrations of common architectural styles of Alameda's houses. For each style, it describes house form and plan, materials, windows and doors, roof, and decorative elements. See pp. 77 – 94 of the Guide to Residential Design, available at this link:

https://www.alamedaca.gov/files/sharedassets/public/alameda/building-planning-transportation/guidelines/cdd_-_plg_-_gud_-_guide_to_residential_design.pdf

CITYWIDE DESIGN REVIEW MANUAL, SECTION 4.3, ARCHITECTURAL STYLE GUIDELINES

Section 4.3 of the Citywide Design Review Manual includes illustrations and descriptions of several architectural styles found in Alameda. It covers common styles of both commercial and residential buildings. See pp. 47 – 84 (as labeled on the pages) of this document (pp. 8 – 45 of the PDF document):

https://www.alamedaca.gov/files/sharedassets/public/alameda/building-planning-transportation/guidelines/citywide_design_review_manual_1-2014_part2.pdf

THE ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORICAL RESOURCES OF THE CITY OF ALAMEDA

https://www.alamedaca.gov/files/assets/public/departments/alameda/building-planning-transportation/planning/architectural-and-historical-resources-1994.pdf